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ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS ON TILES AND TILEWORK

NO. 7

THE DECORATIVE TILES *of* NORTH AFRICA

By REXFORD NEWCOMB
Professor of History of Architecture
University of Illinois

ASSOCIATED TILE MANUFACTURERS
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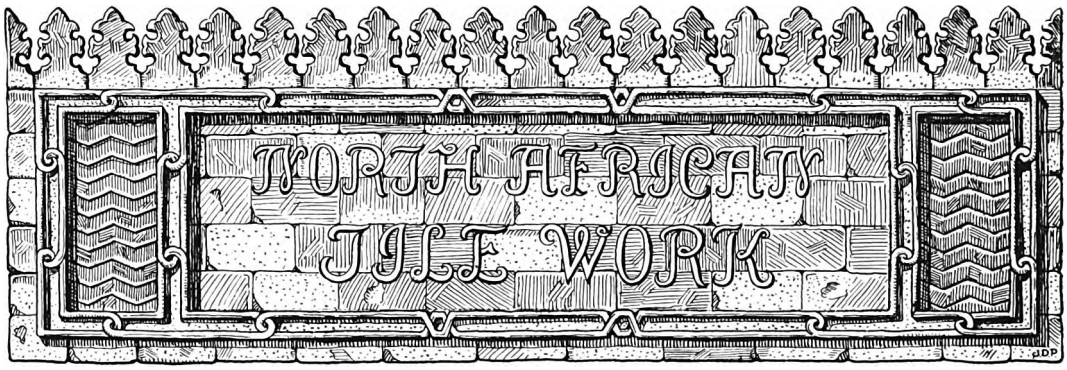

THE DECORATIVE TILES OF NORTH AFRICA

Introduction

In Monographs No. 3 and No. 5 we sought to outline the important role that the Saracens played in developing the ceramic art of old Persia and disseminating it to the Western World. We have seen how it spread to Syria, Turkey and medieval Egypt and how in each of these countries it came to new perfection and brought forth new glories. But two chapters in the story of the Saracens' career in the field of ceramic art remain yet to be told. The *first* has to do with the spread of that art across North Africa—in Tunisia, in Algeria, and in Morocco—the *second* with the glorious culmination of the art in the Spain of the Moors, where as we shall see, the Western World for the first time came into direct contact with those influences which were, in time, to spread to western Europe and to form the basis for our modern practice. This Monograph has to do with the expression that this age-old art of the Saracens found in North Africa, an art which flourished during the Middle Ages and one which is today far from dead, for, as Saladin remarks,* "Morocco, aside from Persia, is the one country where the tradition of Musulman art survives."

*"*Manuel d'Art Musulman*"—I, p. 294.

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A Bit of Colorful North Africa

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THE COMING OF THE SARACENS

To those who are familiar with Moslem history, the sweep of Saracenic power westward from Arabia, through Egypt and across North Africa is a familiar story. Indeed, the rapidity with which the faithful spread the doctrine of the Prophet is one of the remarkable facts of history and has been likened by the more dramatic of our historians to the wild-fire of a burning desert *simoon*, sweeping along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. For it must be remembered that within less than a decade after the death of Mohammed, Amron, the general of Caliph Omar, had conquered the Nile Valley and had established El Fostat, the town that was in time to become Cairo. By 670 Kairawan (Tunisia) had been established and a mosque begun by Okba ben Nafi, and twelve years later, this competent leader of Saracenic arms was pushing his way into *El Maghrib el Aksa*, i.e. "*the farthest west*" portion of the Mohammedan world which we today call Morocco.

North Africa (Map, Fig. 1) had belonged to the colonial system of ancient Greece and later to that of Rome, as the splendid antiquities of these lands now testify, but previous to the conquests of the Mohammedans the southern coast of the Mediterranean had for some years been under the domination of the Teutonic Vandals and Goths. These Vandals, pushed out of Spain by the Goths, took up homes in North Africa. This was in 429 A. D., during the reign of Valentinian III, for whom his mother, Placidia, acted as regent in the West. Aetius and Boniface were the generals of Placidia, and the personal discord between them led to fatalities for the Empire. Aetius, who was a Hun by blood, urged the Vandals, who were temporarily settled in southern Spain, to invade Africa, and, under Gaiseric, they came fifty thousand strong. Boniface was defeated and the Vandals gradually captured the important cities. Gaiseric was a leader of genius and, building up a strong navy, he was able to defy even the Roman power of Constantinople.

The Vandals were of that branch of Christian faith known as Arian, and thus they mistreated the orthodox Christians of North Africa, a course

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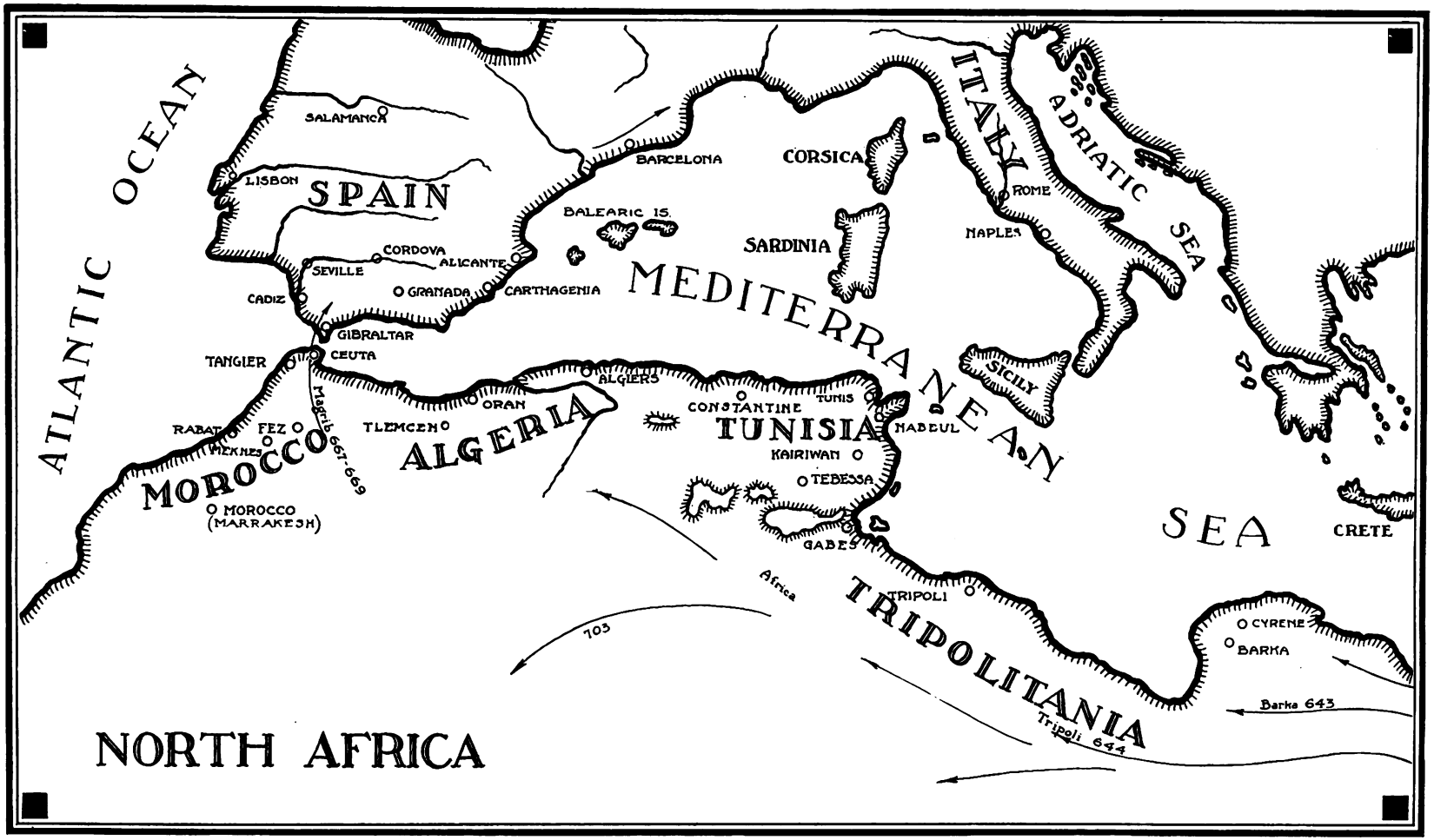

Fig. 1. Map of North Africa Showing Direction of Arab Influence

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destined in time to stir up much ill-feeling against themselves. North Africa remained under Vandal domination until 618 at which time Gothic power leaped the Pillars of Hercules and North Africa became Gothic as had Spain before her.

It was these Goths with whom the Saracens were eventually to contend for the supremacy of the western Mediterranean (North Africa and Spain). The difference in religion, to say nothing of a desire for great landed empires, would be enough to account for this enmity and warfare. When the Saracens struck, the Goths were "no longer the victorious barbarians who had humbled the pride of Rome, despoiled the queen of nations, and penetrated from the Danube to the Atlantic,"* and by 711 they had fallen, through the treachery of their African officers, an easy prey to the arms of the *infidels*.

Taking possession of North Africa and Spain the Mohammedans beheld the fields of Gaul (France) lying open before them. Now the fate of Europe and Christianity hinged upon the result of a single conflict. The Franks, another branch of the Teutonic peoples, and a race which was destined at a later time to produce that important chieftain and able statesman, Charlemagne, remained the only power in western Europe able to combat the march of Moslem armies. The Battle of Tours (732), fought upon the plains between Tours and Portiers, a battle in which the Saracen cavalry charged time and again the infantry of the Franks, was a bitter one, but it ended in the defeat of the scimitar and a victory for the Cross. Charles Martel, the Frankish leader, became a world victor, "Christian Europe was saved, and the Aryan nations escaped subjection at the hands of the Semitic disciples of the Koran."

The Arabs thereafter settled down in their recently gained dominions beyond the Pyrenees in Spain, and in North Africa. The union of the Arabs with the Berbers and other strains which they found in North Africa gave rise to that race known as the Moors and a branch of the Saracenic family destined to leave an important impress upon the history of the world.

Just as the Moslems obtained possession of the western Mediterranean and had made themselves secure in these new lands, the "disruption of the Caliphate" (750) took place. Under the tyrannical rule of the Omayyads of Damascus many of the faithful became embittered and fierce conflicts arose between rival factions who laid claim to the caliphate. In 750 one of the Abassids was elected caliph and all of the Omayyads except one were murdered. This one fled to Africa and in 755 founded the independent *Caliphate of Cordova* in Spain. Thus the Moslem world was divided into two camps, the *eastern portion* (orthodox) owing allegiance to the Abbasids who made Bagdad their capital, and the *western area*, which looked to Cordova for guidance.

*"*Historians' History of the World*," Vol. VIII, p. 192.

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North Africa itself was, however, not without ambition to be considered the centre of Moslem world, and, during the ninth and tenth centuries, the Arabs whose capital was Tunis, became dominant in the western Mediterranean. Through marauding expeditions they established themselves in Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily* and several times attacked Italy. In 909 they, together with the adherents of Ali, in Fez (Morocco) and in conjunction with the Mohammedans in Egypt, formed under a Fatimite chief the Caliphate of Africa, the capital of which was Cairo. The Fatimite caliphs, claiming to be descendants of Ali and Fatima, extended their power over Syria and there came into conflict with the eastern caliphate. The Fatimite dynasty remained in existence until it was conquered by the famous Sultan Saladin (1171).

In Spain the Caliphate of Cordova came to brilliance under Abd-er-Rahman III (912–961) but, due to internal strife and the fact that the Christians of the north were pressing hard upon that frontier, this brilliance was not again attained. In the eleventh century there was anarchy, produced by the African guard of the caliphs, and a serious rebellion of the governors. In 1031 the last descendant of the Omayyads was deposed and in 1060 the very title of caliph vanished. The power was now split into several petty Moslem kingdoms and, although the African Mussulmans came to the aid of their brothers across the strait, one by one these petty kings were conquered until in January, 1492, the last of them, the kings of Granada, capitulated and the whole of Spain was once again Christian.

With this general review of the historical background it is not necessary to go into the varied details of the Arab conquest. Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco were not embraced under one general government and an attempt to order the various vicissitudes through which each of these countries has passed would require far more space than we have available, and result in a tangled mass of legend and fact after all only remotely pertinent to our purpose. Such historic data as are necessary may more easily be introduced as occasion arises in the discussion of the architecture and its accompanying ceramic embellishment.

*It was at this time that much of that Oriental spirit, which so thoroughly colored the architectural monuments of Monreale and Palermo for centuries, found its way into the island.

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GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUNDS

Reference has been made to North Africa and to the four modern countries which go to make up this area. A glance at the map (Fig. 1) will acquaint the reader with the "lay of the land" and the location of the important cities to which we refer in the text. In order, beginning at the Egyptian border, these countries are Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

TRIPOLITANIA is the modern name of the ancient area extending along the North African coast from almost opposite the eastern end of Crete to a point opposite the western end of Sicily (i. e. from 25° to 10° east longitude). This area in ancient times belonged to the Carthaginians and was taken from them by the Romans. Then with the rest of North Africa it was conquered by the Arabs and became Mohammedan in religion and Arabic in speech. It was taken by the Turks in 1552, in whose hands it remained until the Italo-Turkish War (1911–12), at the end of which conflict it passed from Ottoman hands and became an Italian colony. The area is approximately 300,000 square miles, mostly desert, with a population of upwards of a million inhabitants, composed of Arabs, Berbers, Europeans and Jews. The principal cities are: Tripoli, the capital (35,000 pop.), Misurata (14,000 pop.), and Homs (4,000 pop.).

TUNISIA, once an independent state, is now a French protectorate. It is bounded on the south by Tripolitania and on the west by Algeria, the north and west boundaries being formed by the shores of the Mediterranean. Under the Romans, Tunisia was about the same region as Carthage. It was conquered by the Vandals in the fifth, by the Byzantines in the sixth, and by the Arabs in the seventh century. Louis IX of France (Saint Louis), led a crusade to Tunis in 1270 and Charles V of the Empire invaded the country in 1525. Turki of Crete made himself master of the land in 1575, acknowledging, however, the suzerainty of the Sultan of Turkey. His descendants occupied the throne from 1691 to 1871, the while paying tribute to Turkey. France invaded the country in 1881, forcing the reigning *bey* to place himself under French protection. The country is chiefly an agricultural land of some 50,000 square miles, but has tremendous mineral resources which are being developed. The population in 1921 was about 2,094,000, with Tunis as the capital (171,675 pop.). Other centres are Sfax (19,755 pop.), Bizerta (20,765 pop.), and Kairawan, the "sacred city" (20,000 pop.).

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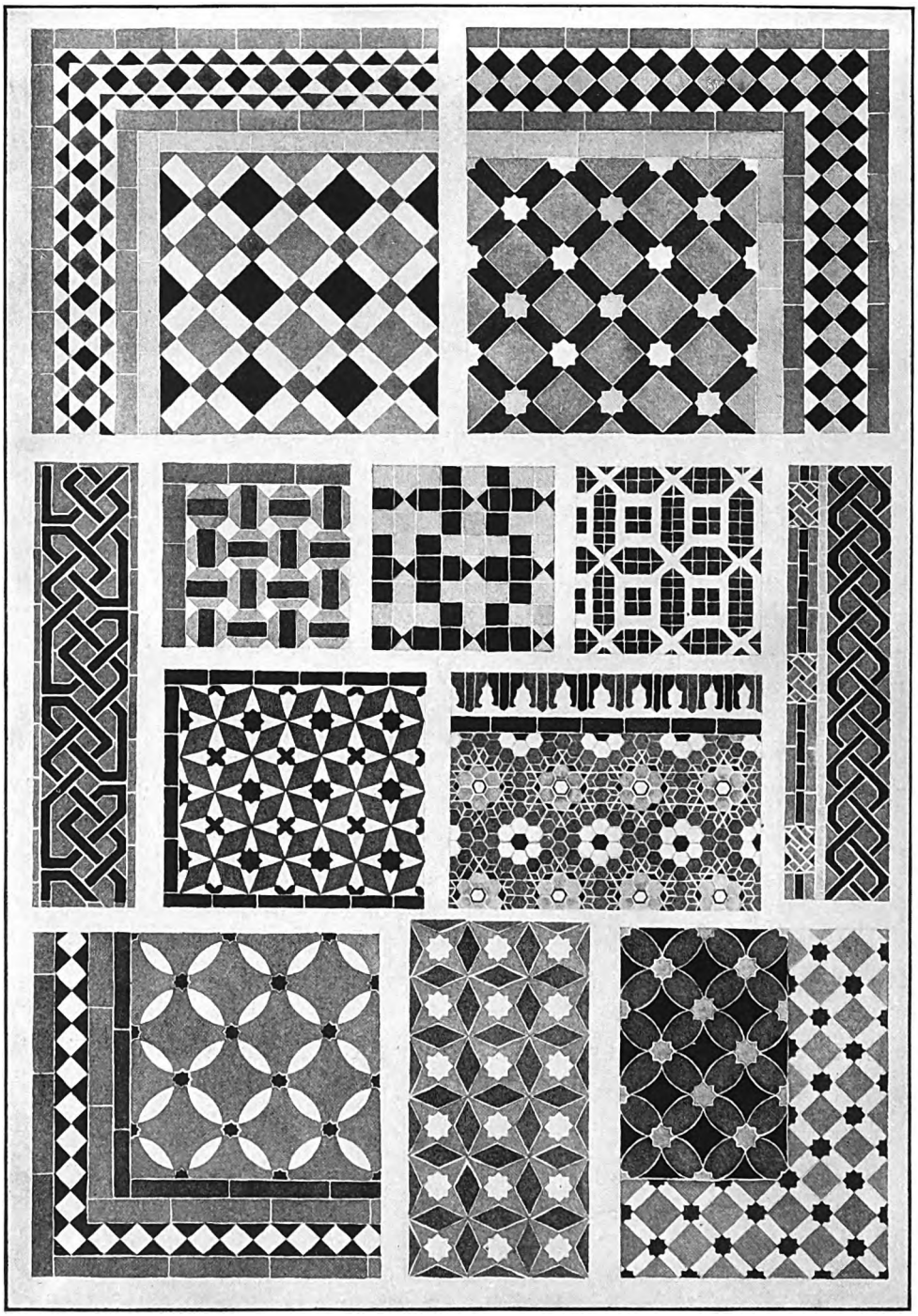

North African Tile Mosaic Patterns (1)

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ALGERIA, lying between Tunisia and Morocco, extends for 650 miles along the Mediterranean coast between 2° 10′ west and 8° 51′ east longitude. The most important portion of the country is that along the coast, about 185,000 square miles in area, which is divided into three departments: Oran on the west, Algiers in the centre and Constantine on the east. The interior desert comprises an area of about 750,000 square miles.

Algeria is an old country. Its prince was an ally of Hannibal and like Carthage it became a Roman province under the Cæsars. It, too, was conquered by the Vandals and for a time secured to the Eastern Empire through the military success of Belisarius. Then it fell to the Saracens and eventually to the Turks who taught the Algerians the art of piracy. Many Europeans were captured and enslaved by them before the nations of Europe took action to prevent such depredations. At length, in 1830, France conquered Algiers and since that time has been engaged in pacifying the country. The population today numbers 5,802,465, comprised largely of Arabs, Berbers, Tunisians, Moroccans and Europeans (680,300). The principal cities are: Algiers (206,595 pop.), Oran (147,105 pop.), Constantine (78,220 pop.), Tlemcen (37,000 pop.), Blidah (35,800 pop.), and Setif (18,500 pop.).

MOROCCO lies at the western end of the *Barbary Coast.* For many years an independent state, the country is today administered as follows: the district of Tangier (Strait of Gibraltar) is internationalized; the northern zone is a Spanish protectorate; the remainder a French protectorate. Fronting both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic and backed up by the Atlas Mountains, Morocco has a magnificent setting. It is not, however, well known geographically by Europeans and, as a result, accurate information regarding the various aspects of the country, outside the Mediterranean coastline, is not available.

Morocco bears distinct evidence of having had a culture in prehistoric times and there are still extant numerous evidences of Roman occupation. Hanno's *Periplus* mentions Carthaginian colonies along the coast, but it was not until about the last century B. C. that the Berbers of Morocco began supplying troops to the Romans. Under Augustus the country was incorporated as a province of the Empire and known as Mauretania. But Roman occupation did not extend far inland and the interior was not explored. In the fifth century the Vandals came in from Spain and by 618 this territory became subject to the Goths.

The coming of the Arabs under Okba (682) was an important event in the history of the country, but it remained for Tarik ibn Zaid in 710 to muster enough strength to cross the Strait to the great rock named for him (*Gibal-al-Tarik*) and begin the conquest of Gothic Spain. The history of the Moorish Empire begins in 788 when Idris I set up his capital at Fez. Since this time

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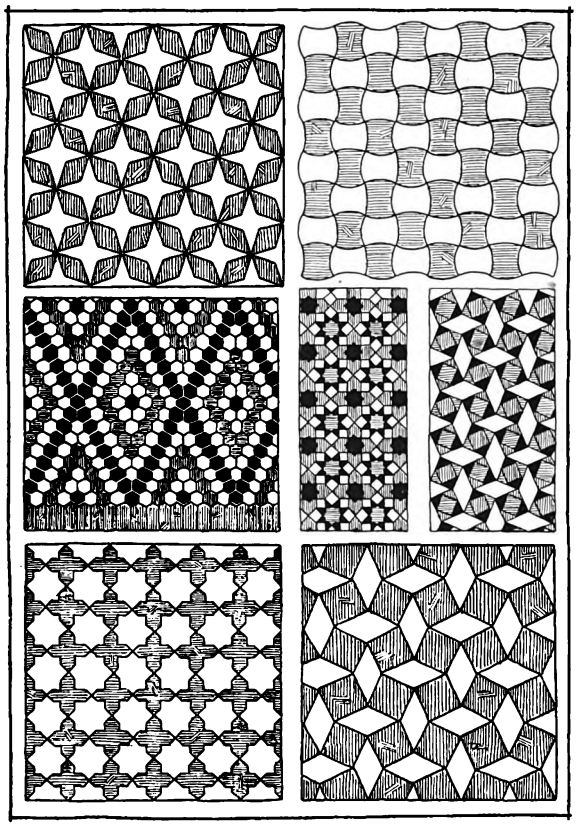
nine dynasties have been in power, the first, the eighth, and the ninth being Arab, the others native Berber. Fez has served as the capital most of the time, although the land has been ruled also from Marrakesh, Meknès and upon occasion from Seville. Due to the rebellion of the Riff tribesmen led by Abd-el-Krim, both Spain and France have been at great expense and loss of life in retaining their interests in the country. A railway now connects Oran (Algeria) with Fez (124,500 pop.), Meknès (38,000 pop.), Rabat (33,000 pop.) and Marrakesh (145,000 pop.).



North African Tile Patterns (2)

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MOGHREB ARCHITECTURE

The type of architecture introduced into North Africa in many respects resembled in the beginning the work at Cairo. As time progressed, however, it distinguished itself sufficiently to constitute a separate "*school*" of the Saracenic Style. Stylistically it stands almost midway between the Mohammedan architecture of Egypt and that of Moslem Spain. The same passion for the building of mosques, minarets, medressas (religious schools or seminaries), tombs, and the more utilitarian aqueducts, fountains and city walls, which characterized the Arabs in the other portions of the world, was exemplified in North Africa and here, as in other Moslem lands, the love for color and decoration and the contrast occasioned by brilliant sunshine and deep shadow led them early to utilize ceramic tiles for the decoration of their buildings. (Fig. 2.)

Here perhaps more than in any other country except Spain, which in so many respects bears close resemblance to North Africa, the buildings turn a bleak and severe face to the outside, reserving their splendors and glories, both in the way of interesting form and resplendent color, for the courtyards, around which the structures are invariably grouped, and for the darkened interior apartments. Those who are familiar with the courts of the Alhambra or the *patios* of such a structure as the Alcazar at Seville are well prepared to appreciate similar features in the architecture of North Africa, particularly in Morocco, where the floors of these courts and the wainscots surrounding them, to say nothing of recessed niches and the pretty

Fig. 2. A Shop in Tunis

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fountains so often found at the centres of such courts, are lavishly encrusted with the handsomest of ceramic tiles.

As in the Moorish work of Spain one sees, especially around doorways and upon the walls above the wainscots, large areas of carved plaster in intricate patterns and frequently bearing mnemonics from the Koran. There is much elaborately carved and painted wood and, upon occasion, excellent *inlaid* wood. Balconies, ceilings and the lintels over columns and piers are almost invariably of wood, the columns and piers themselves being sometimes of wood, but more frequently of masonry, even of marble. The capitals may be of carved marble, but are frequently of carved plaster, while the shafts below are often sheathed in marble mosaic or colorful ceramic tiles in geometrical patterns.

The doors are often beautiful masterpieces of the joiner's art, presenting elaborately panelled, intricately latticed, or splendidly inlaid patterns. Interesting painted doors with quaint floral designs upon the panels are also frequently seen. Windows are filled with most intricate grilles of wrought iron, wood lattices or, at times, pierced plaster tracery. One often sees, also, elaborate carved plaster *bas reliefs* simulating windows and, upon occasion, the effect of a traceried window is produced by a panel of geometrical ceramic mosaic set into a wall.

Fig. 3. Fountain and Doorway to a Private Residence, Fez

One of the glories of the Moroccan city is the fountain. There are two general classes of these. The *first* is what we may designate as a *wall* fountain. (Fig. 3.) It usually consists of a niche or panel upon a wall from which pipes spout running water into a masonry basin below. The public fountains, often erected by pious Mohammedans, are almost

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invariably of this type and are usually embellished with the best products of the ceramist's art. The *second* type is the free-standing fountain, so often found at the centre of the courtyard of the Mohammedan house (Fig. 4). Of this class there are two varieties: (a) a carved ornamental basin upon a pedestal which stands at the centre of a polygonal pool; (b) a small circular or octagonal basin upon the pavement with a bronze nozzle at its centre.

Either type may be placed at the centre of an elaborately patterned tiled area that spreads itself out upon the pavement of the court like a splendid Oriental rug. Upon occasion the central panels of such a design are slightly sunken in order that any moisture shed upon the pavement may be returned to the centre and carried away by a drain. Such fountains form the central motif in almost every courtyard and, aside from the suggestion of coolness which their gurgle supplies, they form an admirable and colorful decorative note, thus materially contributing to the unity of the design.

The mosques, medressas and tombs, like the domestic types, turn relatively bleak walls to the outside, but often the minarets are made resplendent with surface ornament in both relief and color. Unlike minarets in any other Moslem land, those of North Africa have a peculiar and characteristic silhouette. Square in plan, they rise, almost uniformly sheer and straight to a crenellated parapet, at the centre of which stands a second box-like cupola, square or octagonal in plan (Fig. 5). Thus, one sees nothing that resembles the finger-like spires of Turkey, the circular turrets of India, or the variety found in Cairo. Built of brick, the sides are panelled in intricate interlacings of this material, relieved by carved plaster or elabor-

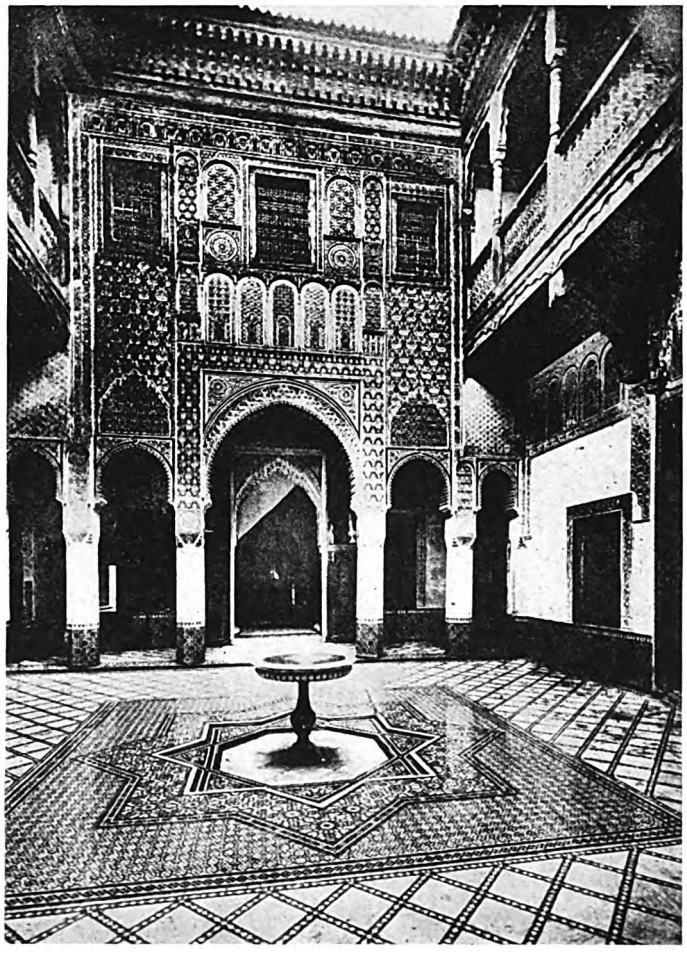

Fig. 4. Courtyard in the Residence of a Wealthy Gentleman, Meknès

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ated by marble or faïence mosaics. Of all the minarets of Islam, only the famous Giralda of Seville (Fig. 6), once the minaret of the Great Mosque and the prototype of the splendid tower that graced the one-time Madison Square Garden in New York City, bears a resemblance to the minarets of Barbary. But we must remember that the Saracenic architecture of Spain was the nearest relative to the Saracenic architecture of the Barbary States.

One of the earliest, and at the same time unique, minarets of North Africa is that of the Congregational Mosque at Kairawan (Fig. 7). Here, instead of the normal two-terraced type we find a staunch crenellated tower approximately 35 feet square and 85 feet high, crowned by a smaller crenel-

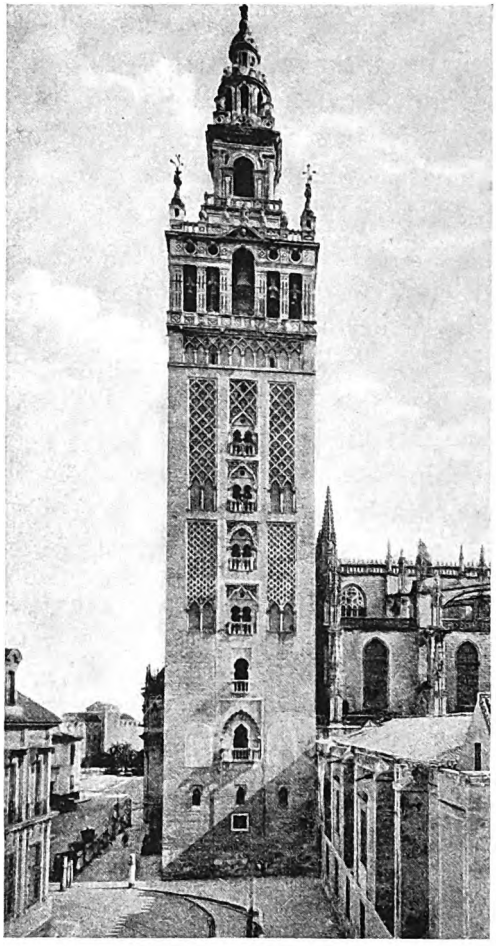

Fig. 6

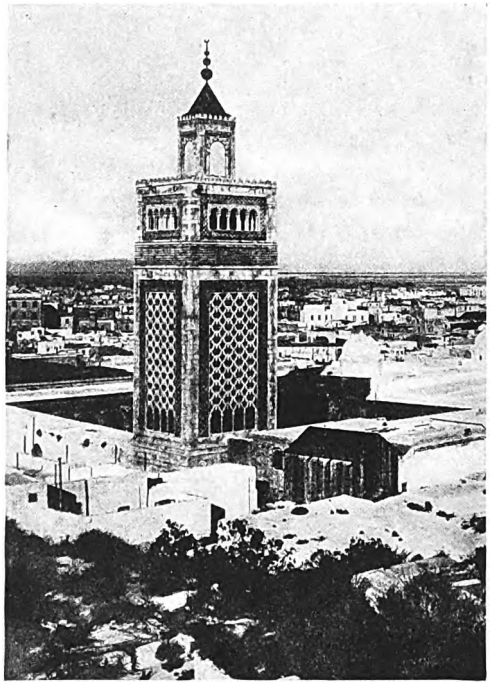

Fig. 5. Minaret of the Great Mosque, Tunis

lated square stage and a final cube-like cupola bearing a melon-shaped dome. Of this quaint structure Rivoira* remarks, "The minaret is the oldest now in existence, and its long life has by no means reached its close. The thickness of the walls, the character of the materials used, the kinds of mortar employed, may well assure it some thousand years of existence, provided that it does not succumb to some natural catastrophe, or to the still more dangerous effects of man's destructive impulses . . . In addition to its early date† the

*Rivoira, "*Moslem Architecture*," p. 43.
†VIII Century.

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minaret at Kairawan, in the plainness of its exterior, presents one feature which throws some light on the development of structures of this kind. The earliest minarets were plain square towers." Thus it may be said that these staunch square minarets of Barbary stand closer in idea to the original minarets of Islam than do those of any other country.

As time went on, however, the minaret, like the bell-tower of Christendom, received an increasing amount of attention, with the result that, in the various lands, it took on forms in harmony with other architectural types developed therein. But in the Barbary states it kept its essential box-like form, relying upon applied ornament to make itself beautiful. In fact, all the *exterior* forms of Barbary are simpler in silhouette and less elaborate in detail than Moslem architecture in other lands. This sombre character is probably the result of the environment, which is predominantly of the desert type. (Fig. 8.)

Fig. 7. Minaret of the Congregational Mosque, Kairawan

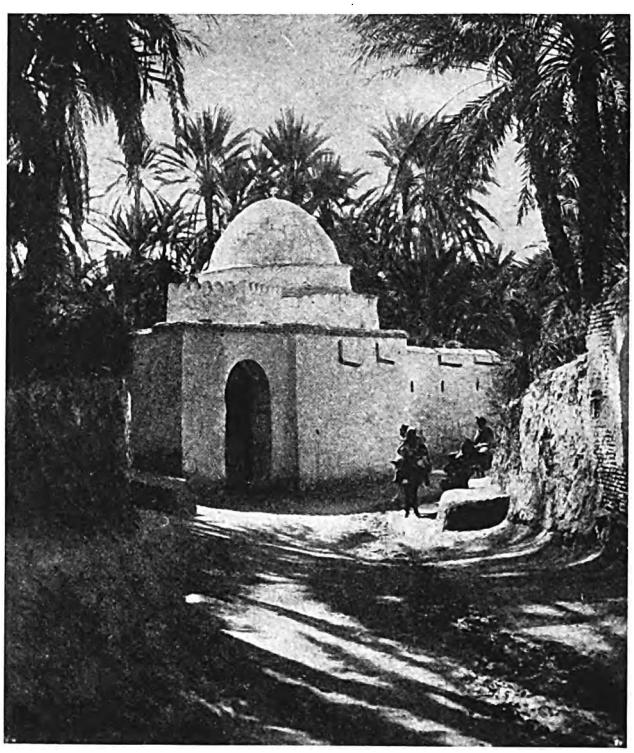

Fig. 8. A Saint's Tomb in an Oasis, North Africa

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NORTH AFRICAN CERAMICS

If Kairawan is a place to look for early Moslem architectural forms it may also be a place in which to find early ceramic art. Thus it proves to be, and it is to the Congregational Mosque, already referred to, that we turn. Rivoira tells us that the structure was founded originally by Sidi Okba, governor of Africa (670–75). Hassan, who captured Carthage (696–705) found the structure standing and rebuilt it. Often the minaret, already referred to (Fig. 7), is attributed to Hassan, but it is now shown that Caliph Hisham (724–743), at the request of Bishr, governor of Kairawan, had the original structures pulled down and rebuilt. A third reconstruction seems to have taken place under Yazid (772–787) and yet again under Ziyadat Allah I, the Aghlabite emir of Africa (816–837), who razed it to the ground in order that he might rebuild it. The mosque of Ziyadat Allah's time is essentially the structure that survives to this day, although Ibrahim II (874–902) made some alterations. For one thing "he constructed the dome over the *mirab*, embellished the building, and added to its front a two-aisled portico crowned by a cupola."*

Rivoira makes the further statement that "when the dome was built, the wall in which the mirab is set was decorated with metallic lustre tiles brought from Baghdad . . . "

Migeon† also refers to this revetment of faïence lustre tiles and remarks that it is important that these and their inscriptions be exactly restored. "This is a task," he adds, "for the directorship of antiquities of Tunisia. The tradition resting upon the affirmations of many Arab authors corresponds with and affirms that the founder of the Aghlabite dynasty, Ibraham Ibn el Aghlab in 242 A.H., 894 A.D. had these faïence tiles brought from Bagdad for the adornment of the mirab and the wood of the plane-tree for the construction of the mimbar of the mosque. It may turn out, thus, to prove that, from the early times of the *hegira*, Mesopotamia had knowledge of the process of making lustre tiles. It is necessary to examine carefully the quality of the tiles of Kairawan and to compare them with those pieces, reasonably known to be of probable Mesopotamian origin." Thus we are certain at any rate, be the origin of these tiles what it may, that such were in existence

*Rivoira, "*Moslem Architecture*," 34.
†Migeon, "*Manuel d'Art Musulman*," II, 257.

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in Tunisia by the IX century, which date, as compared with those cited in Monographs 3 and 5, is sufficiently antique to be of great interest.

How early tiles were manufactured in that part of North Africa outside of Egypt it would be difficult to tell with exactitude. There has been a tendency to place earlier dates upon local manufacture than either documentary evidence or the existing fragments would seem to warrant. This led De Morgan to remark: "The course of the Arabs, from Cairo to Tangier, has been said to be traceable by the glazed and decorated wall-tilings of their buildings . . . This is in a sense true, but it has been more than once told, so as to convey a false impression, that the Saracen invaders of Africa built tile-kilns at every station of importance, and that pottery factories were at work in Spain, if not during the time of the Abbasides, at any rate very soon after the establishment of the Caliphate of Cordova . . . But the tendency

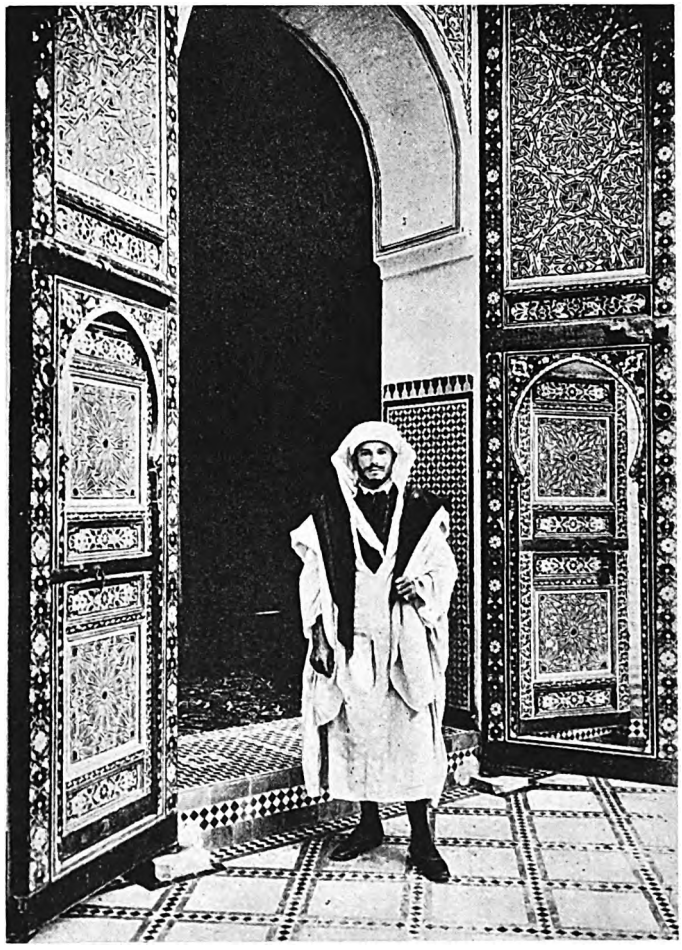

Fig. 9. A Doorway in Fez

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of more recent investigation is to ascribe all the surviving examples of Arab wall-tiling in Spain to a much later date."*

What was *not* possible in Spain, where resources and power were greater than in Africa, could scarcely have been possible at so early a time in Barbary. However, imported tiles, as we have seen at Kairawan, were not unknown. Migeon† is of the opinion that the Moghreb got his influence directly from Andalusia and cites the work of Messrs. William and George Marçais‡ to prove the point. MM. Marçais (on page 37) cite an old text of Ibn Khaldoun which leaves no doubt concerning the artistic borrowing which such a prince of Tlemcen as Abou Tachfin made from the art of Granada. Moreover, Migeon is of the opinion that MM. Marçais clearly prove that the tile revetments of metallic lustre faïence and the inscriptions of the Mosque of Méchouar at Tlemcen certainly show evidence of Andalusian manufacture.

Now, doubtless a good deal of the ceramic decoration of the North African mosques was imported from Spain, especially during the days when Moslem rule in Spain was at its height. This fact does not rob the Moorish peoples of one whit of their glory. Whether fashioned in Spain or in North Africa is of little moment. After all, the Moors of North Africa and the Moors of Spain were, however they differed, brothers in blood, religion and culture!

About the XIV century revetments of faïence became very popular in North Africa and perhaps no part of western Islam used ceramic architectural ornament with better taste or greater discrimination than did the builders of Tlemcen. Here, it appears, stamped or embossed paving tiles were also popular. But Kairawan and Tlemcen were not the only cities that enjoyed ceramic adornment. In each of the four countries of Barbary a potter's art arose and in each bricks, roofing tiles, jugs, domestic utensils and decorative tiles were manufactured.

Of the four countries, however, it is in Tunisia and Morocco that a vital *modern* industry survives and, indeed, ware from both countries is still imported to America. Saladin§ remarks that "It is in Morocco that the Andalusian tradition is conserved in the utmost purity. Such monuments as the palace of the sultan at Tangier, which is relatively modern, with their arches decorated by stalactites, their pavements of faïence mosaic and their rich ceilings, are not unworthy of an Alhambra or a Generalife . . . The private houses with their same simple arrangements, resemble very nearly the Arabic houses of Granada or Seville." (Fig. 9.)

*De Morgan in *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. 24–2–92, 757.
†Migeon, "*Manuel d'Art Musulman*," II, 338.
‡Marçais, "*Les Monuments Arabes de Tlemcen.*"
§Saladin, "*Manuel d'Art Musulman*," Vol. I, 286.

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MOROCCAN TILES

Speaking of modern Morocco and particularly of Fez, Jean Gallotti, in his delightful book, "*Le Jardin et La Maison Arabes*" has this to say:* "When you ramble through the labyrinth of Fez it is not a pile of lime or stone that indicates the construction of a house. There, under your feet, is a gravel of little chips of terra-cotta smeared with colored enamel. You recognize the debris as that of mosaic, the *zellijs*, with which one paves and wainscots the sheltered dwelling beyond the great wall, through which you peer. In reality the nail-studded door has not as yet been hung. But you need not enter, for the impression is always the same.

"At first sight there is the winding corridor; the shade and coolness, which already prevails within the lane thickens; then, inside the court with its vertical perspectives, suddenly appears the oblique dust-rays of the light, the fragrance of timber-work of cedar, and finally, sharp and clear, a noise starts from the ground, and arising, reverberates through the colonnades and walls toward the top of the pointed arches. It is the ringing noise of the tile-setters who trim their tiles with steel hammers." (Fig. 10.)

I translate further:† "In Morocco there are several hundred wonderful practitioners. Although probably their art is derived from the mosaics of colored stone and smalt, such as that in which the Byzantines and first Musulmans were skilled, and such as we ourselves still employ, it differs so distinctly from ours today that it is necessary to speak about it with exactitude."

But the art of the ceramic mosaicist in Fez is a very old one and it is not surprising that in time it should have distinguished itself from that of other centres. Leon l'Africain, who wrote his description of Fez at the beginning of the XVI century of our era, notes in passing that a brilliant ceramic industry was in existence during the century before, and Alfred Bel‡ cites the author of an old chronicle, entitled, "*Raud ue-Quirtas fi ahbari madinati Fas*," who wrote his book about 1325, as having related that the inhabitants of the XIV century paid great attention to construction, employing enamelled tiles, marble, sculpture and other adornments. This was during the reign of the Merinide Solaiman,

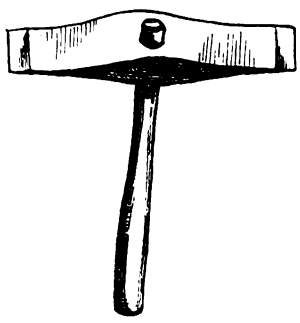

Fig. 10

*Vol. I, p. 55.
†Gallotti, "*Le Jardin et La Maison Arabes*," I, 56.
‡Bel, "*Les Industries de la Céramique a Fès*," 2.

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who died in the year 1310. That the Middle Age ceramic industry in Fez reached a considerable development we may believe with Bel, especially if we examine the revetments of the XIV century *medressehs*, those in the mosques and in private residences, and the splendid fragments that are now preserved as museum exhibits.

The principal types of tile decoration used in Morocco we may classify as follows: (a) *ceramic mosaic* and (b) *painted tiles*. A great deal of the ceramic mosaic is similar to the ware produced in this country under the same name, being made up of small squares, hexagons and other regular shapes, and relying upon color variation to work out the pattern (Fig. 11). A second variety of ceramic "mosaic" is a *real* mosaic in that the tiles are cut and laid in a pattern as are marble or glass *tesseræ* (Fig. 12).

A very interesting variety of tile work is that in which whole glazed tiles, usually black ones, are employed to make the Arabic or cufic inscriptions seen upon the borders of tile panels (Upper Part, Fig. 12). The process is as follows: The inscription is laid out and then, by means of chisels or sharp hammers, the surface around the letters is cut through the enamel and back to the terra-cotta, thus giving a black inscription upon a *terra-cotta* background. Such a process requires extreme skill lest the enamel which forms the characters themselves be chipped off. The background may then be enamelled a different color or left plain. The same method is sometimes

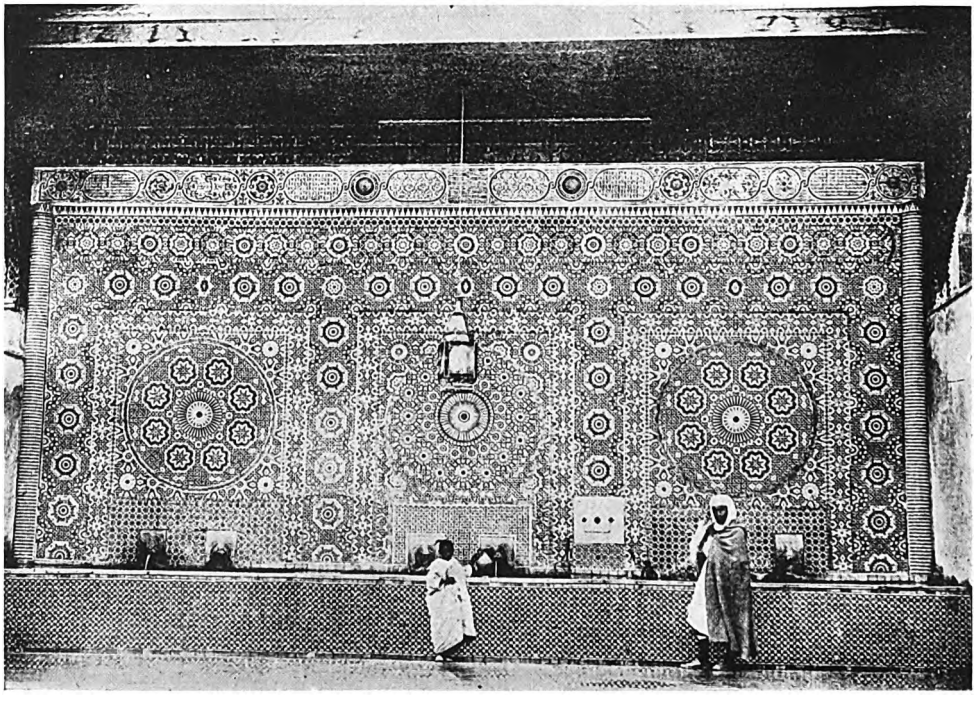

Fig. 11. Public Fountain with Faïence Mosaic Decoration, Meknès, Morocco

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resorted to where the various bands of a fret pattern (laid in mosaic) cross. "Concerning the native painted tiles," says Gallotti,* "they appear never to have had in Morocco the success which they attained in other Islamic countries. They are used, however, and one discovers, here and there, fragments of pavements or of wainscots of a design which, while not equal to the analogous works of Persia or Asia Minor, are, notwithstanding, superior to the Tunisian tiles of Nabeul. They are of stanniferous enamel heavily fired upon the raw material. They never present the metallic lustre nor offer the appearance that associates itself with the work of the Spanish ceramic school and which is imparted by the sumptuous revetments of Seville and Granada. It would appear, on the contrary, that one should consider them to be allied with the school of Delft.

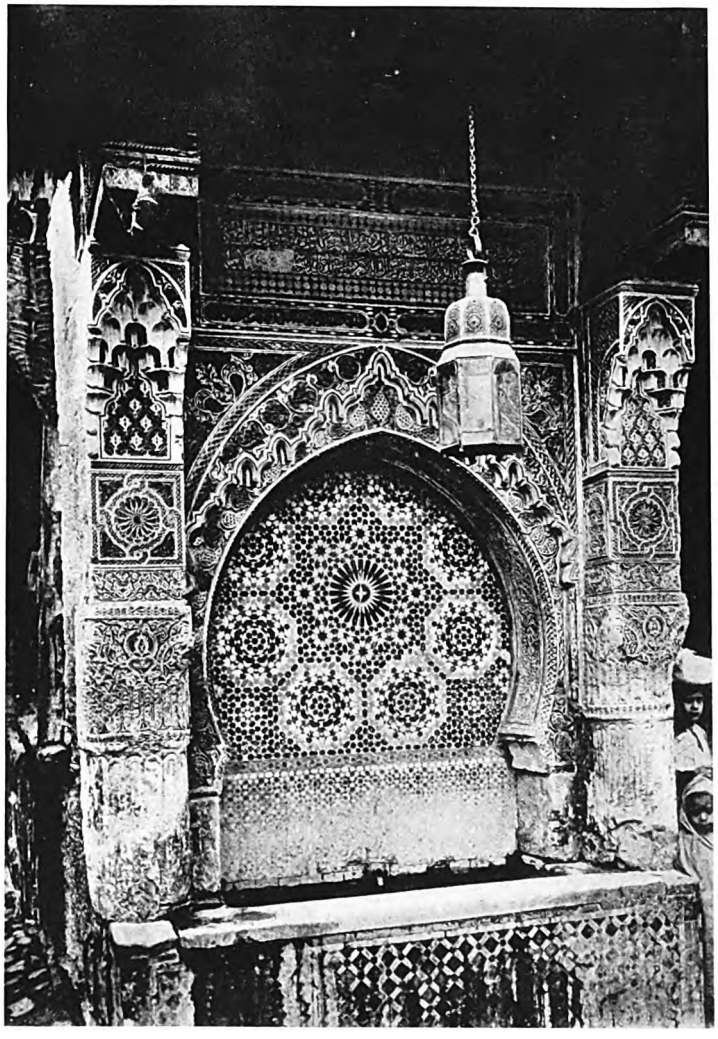

Fig. 12. Faïence upon a Fountain in Fez

*Gallotti, "*Le Jardin et la Maison Arabes*," I, 64.

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Fig. 13. A View in the Pottery Market, Fez

"The mausoleum of Moulay Ismaïl at Meknès is wainscoted by tiles, the form and color of which (especially the use of red) confirms the local tradition which attributes the manufacture to Dutch slaves. They are, in short, typical Delft faïence tiles decorated in the Musulman style. In another part of Meknès one recognizes many imported from Delft. So that, from this, one may deduce that the art of painted tiles in Morocco was in its prime influenced by the Dutch school and, above all, its success insured by the numerous Christian slaves captured by Moulay Ismaïl (at the end of the XVII and the beginning of the XVIII centuries). The manner does not appear elsewhere to have continued beyond his reign and the *mosaic* is still very much in favor." Thus, *unlike* Cairo, Persia and Turkey, the North African centres did not develop the art of tile painting to a brilliant degree.

If one were to characterize the three important divisions of North Africa he would say that Tunis is distinctly Arabic, even to this day, that the Turkish element is dominant in Algeria while the Moroccan towns are eminently Moorish. That is to say they continue in a peculiar way the traditions and, perhaps more nearly than is possible elsewhere, are able to perpetuate those features which made Cordova, Seville and Granada renowned. It is to be hoped that Morocco will be spared the ruin by European influence that has come to Algiers and that she may be allowed again to rear a true Moorish art. The country is peculiarly fitted to replace and continue that which has been irrevocably lost in Andalusia, and one of the great claims that the cities of the Sherif Empire make for our attention is their important mission in preserving and perpetuating their splendid Moorish inheritance (Fig. 13).

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TUNISIAN TILES

From what has been said it must not be concluded that the Moroccan cities are the only places in North Africa where a distinguished tile art is to be found. We have already had occasion to mention the splendid work of Kairawan and Tlemcen. The difference is this; that, while modern architecture in Morocco is still embellished with tiles, the ceramic art of distinction in other centres belongs largely to a bygone age, and the modern work, where it exists, cannot be compared with the fine, *old* work.

To the student of Saracenic art perhaps no North African country is more interesting than is Tunisia. Here, in addition to the "sacred city" of *Kairawan*, are: *Tunis*, largest city in North Africa, itself a centre of Saracenic art with its Musée Arabe (a division of the famous *Bardo*); *Nabeul*, the ancient Neapolis, noted for its pottery manufactures; *Gabes*, famed for its Saracenic art; and *Tuzer*, in the Jerid, which furnished the splendid *Mirab* (prayer niche), removed some years ago to Paris.

Kairawan contains some of the finest treasures of Saracenic art in Tunisia, but the city suffered greatly by the secularization following the Turkish conquest and has been further ruined by blundering French attempts at restoration. The mosques are, of course, the chief structures of the city and, *unlike* other centres in Tunisia, are open to Christians. The tiles of the

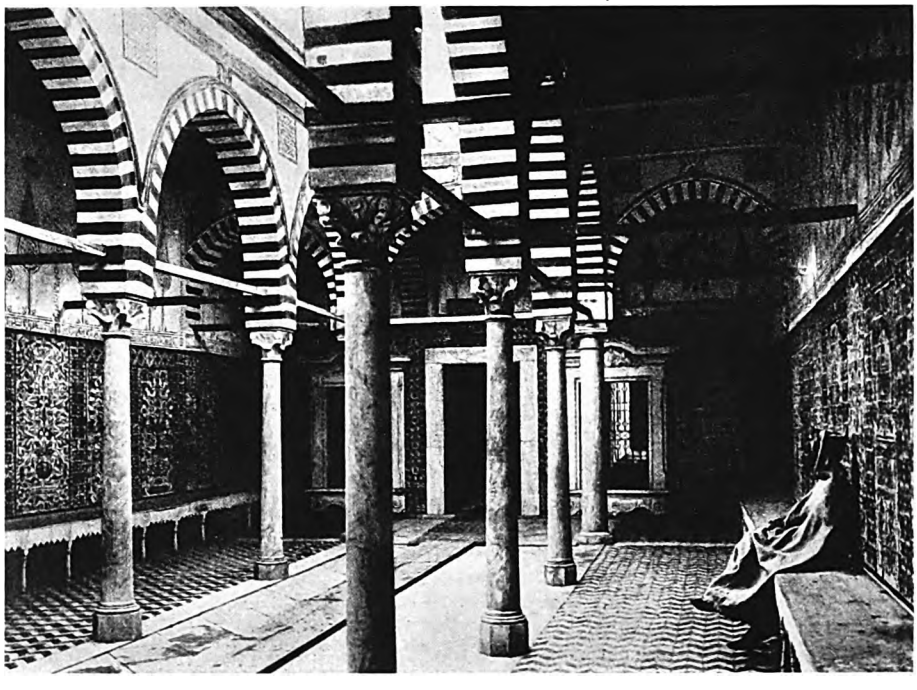

Fig. 14. Mosque of the Companion, Kairawan (So called Mosque of the Barber)

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Congregational Mosque we have mentioned elsewhere and in Fig. 14 the court of the "Mosque of the Barber" is shown. Here the use of decorative ceramic tiles is plainly indicated. This structure, religiously and artistically, is by some considered the most important building of the city. It is *officially* the Mosque of the Companion (i.e. of the Prophet) and derives its great sacredness from the fact that its shrine possesses what are said to be three hairs from the beard of Mohammed, which were buried with the saint, a companion of Mohammed, here interred. This fact gave rise to the legend that the tomb contained the remains of Mohammed's barber. The mosque consists of several courts and chambers and contains some beautiful glass. The court, which forms the entrance of the shrine, is richly adorned with faïence tiles and modelled plaster and is surrounded by an arcade of white marble columns. The minaret is also plated with tiles and bears aloft a golden crescent. Kairawan, next to Mecca, is the most sacred city to the African Moslem and constant pilgrimages are made to its shrines.

Tunis, especially the Arab city, has many examples of old Moorish architecture (Figs. 2 and 5), among them the Dar-el-Bey (palace of the bey), the Jamaa-al-Zeituna (Mosque of the Olive Tree), Sadiki College and the Courts (Palais de Justice), built in 1901, but decorated with faïence taken from an old Tunisian palace. The largest mosque of the city is that of Sidi Mahrez near which was buried John Howard Payne, American consul at Tunis and author of "Home, Sweet Home," who died here in 1852.* Not far away arise the rose-colored (marble) walls and the green-tiled domes of the mausoleum of the beys.

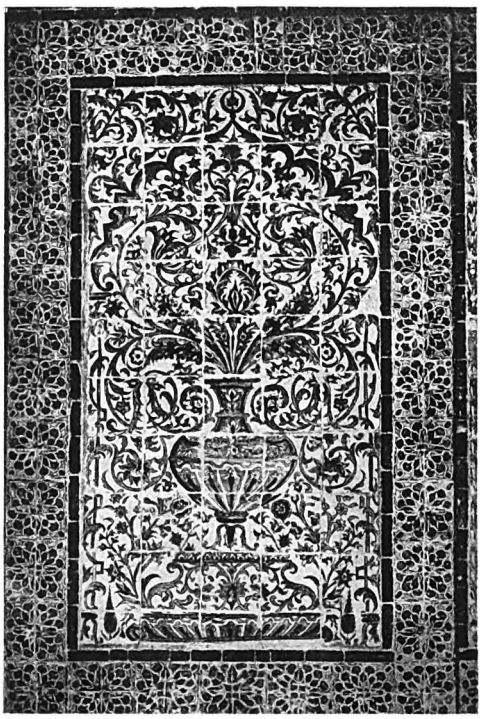

Fig. 15. Musée du Bardo—Faïences arabes

A place of great interest artistically is the Bardo, an ancient palace about a mile and a half from the northwest gate of the city. This old palace, famed for its "lion court," a sort of terrace approached by broad steps flanked by marble lions, and its apartments in the Moorish style, is now used as a museum of Tunisian antiquities. The Musée Arabe, which occupies a smaller adjacent palace, is filled with examples illustrative of Saracenic culture in Tunisia. Here, amongst other fine specimens of Arabic art, are numerous splendid fragments of Tunisian cer-

*His body has since been removed to Washington, D. C.

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amic work (Fig. 15). Many of the residences of Tunis, like the Palais Hussein, with their panels of faïence upon the walls and their painted ceilings, present a pretty aspect.

ALGERIAN CERAMICS

Perhaps the two most important centres in Algeria from the standpoint of artistic interest are the cities of Algiers and Tlemcen. To be sure, Oran, Constantine and even the oasis town of Biskra furnish some examples of faïence tiles, but it is at Algiers, and particularly at Tlemcen, that the cream of Algerian ceramic work is to be found. The public buildings of Algiers, including the *Kasbah* (citadel), the government offices (formerly the British Consulate), and the palaces of the governor-general and the archbishop are fine old Moorish houses (Fig. 16). The ceramic tiles in the archbishop's palace and in the vestibule of the governor-general's palace are especially striking, although apparently of Spanish or Italian manufacture.* The Library-Museum (Bibliothèque-Musée) preserves, particularly in its court, a truly Oriental atmosphere and is brilliantly enlivened by the glint and color of the tile revetments, while the Mosque of Sidi Abd-er-Rahman (1108–1697), even in the adjacent cemetery, makes large use of tiles for its decoration.

The Grand Mosque (Jamaa-el-Kebir) is traditionally said to be the oldest mosque in Algiers. The *mimbar* (pulpit) bears a date showing its existence in 1018. The *minaret* was built by Abu Tachfin, sultan of Tlemcen in 1324. The New Mosque (Jamaa-el-Jedid) dates from the 17th century and shows an intense Byzantine influence. Neither of these structures is as interesting, artistically or decoratively, as the older buildings previously mentioned.

Tlemcen, a city now little known, was at one time a very important place. Situated in the western portion of Algeria near the Moroccan border, it stands upon a splendid site on the north slope of the Lella Selta hills, 2500 feet above sea-level. Among the cities famous in the annals of Moorish art and civilization it takes a high rank and its architectural monuments, although not so extensive, deserve comparison with those of Seville or Granada. The history of the city has been both romantic and fickle, but between the 14th and 16th centuries came to great prosperity and brilliance under the Abd-el-Mahid dynasty. At this time when its population reached 125,000, the city enjoyed an extensive commerce and maintained a brilliant court and a powerful army. Christians seem to have been welcomed by the rulers and the sultan included in his army a Christian body-guard.

The various quarters of the city are grouped about the principal mosque, the Jamaa-el-Kebir (built in 1136), the brick minaret of which arises to a

*Saladin, "*Manuel d'Art Musulman*," I, 279.

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height of 112 feet. This minaret is adorned with marble columns and encased in faïence mosaic of the most varied designs. An alabaster (Algerian onyx) fountain stands at the centre of the court and seventy-two columns support the arches of the interior. The *mihrab* is elaborated by beautiful arabesques.

Another mosque of great interest is that of El-Halawi (764–1353), just outside the walls of the town. The building is graced with splendid columns of Algerian onyx with richly sculptured capitols. There is a fine arcade surrounding the court, and the minaret and portals are resplendent with intricate decoration in brick fretwork and faïence tiles. The old Mosque of Sidi Ahmed bel Hassan (1298 A. D.) is now transformed into a museum of antiquities where many excellent examples of old Moorish work are to be seen. The interior is decorated by alabaster columns and sculptures of great beauty and richness, the delicately carved ceiling of cedar still showing traces of its polychromatic decorations. The exterior, unfortunately, has been altered since the French occupation.

A very beautiful specimen of Moorish art is the Mosque of Sidi-Bou-Medina, about a mile southeast of the city. It was founded in 1337 by Ali V of Tlemcen, who is known in history as the black sultan. The principal entrance is decorated by faïence mosaic and the pointed horseshoe arch of this portal is recalled upon the lacelike arcades which support the roof. A side doorway (restored during the 18th century) is completely plated with decorative tiles. The doors are of cedar wood covered with repoussé bronze, showing a geometric interlaced pattern. They bear a comparison with Ghiberti's famous gates at the baptistry of Florence.

Fig. 16. Public Fountain in the Kasbah Quarter, Algiers

Saladin* remarks the striking resemblance of the decorative elements of this structure to similar work in Spain and accounts for it by the exodus of Andalusian Musulmans from Cordova and Seville to North Africa after the fall of these cities in 1236 and 1248, respectively. There is a tradition, however, that the tile mosaics came from Morocco, a belief entirely possible since Tlemcen is not far from the Moroccan frontier.

At Mansura, about one and one-half miles west of Tlemcen, stand the

*Saladin, "*Manuel d'Art Musulman*," I, 257.

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Decorated Tunisian Tile

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ruins of a mosque, the minaret of which is thought by many to have been one of the noblest built by the Moors. Of the minaret Saladin* says, "The tower still standing is, like the tower of Hassan at Rabat, upon the upper part decorated by a trellise of interlacing meshes, and above this one finds a series of the blind arcatures which encompassed the minarets of the Moghreb . . . In the crevices left by the sculpture glistened green and brown faïence tiles which have in large part disappeared." This minaret, which stands upon the axis of the structure, served as the principal entrance, the doorway itself being beautifully carved. The structure, 125 feet high, was largely constructed of hewn stone. An inscription records that it was erected by order of Aban Yokub Yusef.

Besides these mentioned there are nearly sixty other mosques, great and small, at Tlemcen, many of which furnish splendid examples of tile decoration.

CONCLUSION

Thus, briefly, have we sketched the aspects of ceramic decoration in the various countries of North Africa. As in other lands of Islam, the Moslem here proves himself a master of this age-old and versatile medium. There is much that the architect of today can learn from these old Moors of the Moghreb, lessons in the combination of brick and tiles, stone and tiles, stucco and tiles, and, whether or not one designs in this Oriental vein, there is much of value that may be utilized in a colorful modern architecture of whatever inspiration.

*Saladin, Op. Cit. I, 255.

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